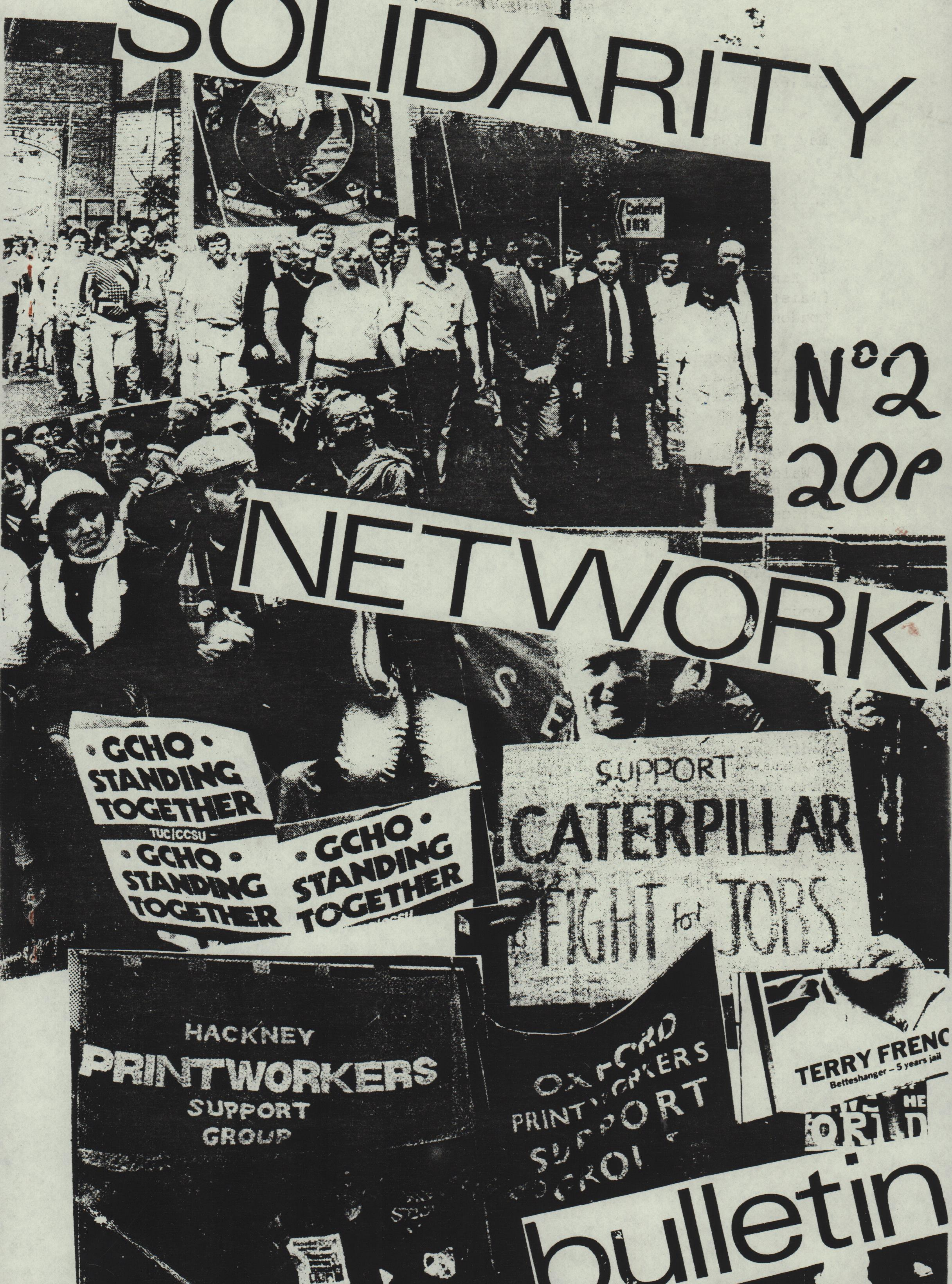
SOLIDARITY NETWORK

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bulletin

SOLIDARITY NETWORK BULLETIN

May 17th 1988

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THE P&O STRIKE

As this Bulletin goes to print we have just heard of the decision of the National Executive of the NUS ordering Sealink crews on strike in solidarity with the sacked P&O seafarers back to work. The original decision of the NUS to defy the law and spread the action was an important and historic decision pointing the way to a serious challenge to the law. The return to work of Sealink, however is a very serious blow to the strike and returns the P&O strikers to a position of isolation.

The following statement was presented to a meeting of the Solidarity Network held at the Miners Welfare in Deal on Saturday May 7th.

At last a trade union has stood up to Tory anti-union laws and spread the action in defence of workers in struggle. The NUS has called out all its members in solidarity with the strikers in Dover. The response of the law has been to fine the NUS £150,000, sequestrate the whole it its assets and close down its offices. The NUS rightly say that members come before money.

Previous strikes, the miners and the printworkers, were left to fight alone and were defeated for that reason. This must not happen to the seafarers. They are now fighting for the whole of the trade union movement. They are giving us the opportunity to mount a fight to defeat the anti-union laws. For the NUS defeat could mean the virtual end of the union. The Dover sackings are already 10% of its membership. If P&O win the other Companies will quickly follow suit with an onslaught on working conditions - in line with what is taking place in other sectors of industry, from the car plants to the hospitals.

Support is being organised but more is needed. The NEC of the Labour Party has rightly called for cash to be raised, but do they support the NUS in breaking the law and spreading the action? Norman Willis has been to ACAS to try and do a deal with management, which failed because of the contempt shown by P&O. Instead of trying to do a deal Willis should be organising TUC support for the NUS. The TUC called successful limited action over GCHQ. This is a much bigger issue - the the courts are now making massive intervention into the trade union movement.

To stop the seafarers being isolated the TUC and other unions have to begin to move. They have the authority in the movement needed at this time. Supporting action should be called, either from the General Council or from a special Congress. At the same time calls for action should be raised within the individual unions, particularly those connected with the shipping industry.

Support Groups played a major role in the miners strike and in the Wapping dispute. They are needed more that ever now. Like the miners the seafarers have no means of subsistance other than the labour movement. Support groups need to be set up and food and money raised urgently. If this is to be successful we have to ensure that this issue, and the seafarers case is made central to everything which happens in the labour movement. They should be invited onto every platform, to every conference and every event.

All cheques should be made out to Deal Womens Support Group (do not mention the NUS or the strike) and sent to Magnus House, Mill Hill, Deal Kent.

REPORT FROM DOVER

I became interested in the Solidarity Network after being introduced by Terry French, a victimised miner. We were only two weeks into our strike when the Kent Area of the NUM gave us solidarity and support by giving us the use of their office, Magness House, the Miners Walfare Club and the benefit of their experiences during the 1984/1985 strike.

Magness house is where we are now based, we have a telephone, kitchen and a large romm where we can hold meetings. The NUM has given us their contact lists throughout Britain to help us to spread the word about what P&O are trying to do to us the seamen. Our food kitchen for deal is based in the Miners Welfare Club where we are now feeding 250 people 7 days a week.

The strike is not just about money or the time we get off, but the safety aspects involved. In March last year 193 people were tragically killed. In a subsequent enquiry P&O were criticised for their sloppy operating procedures and couldn't-care-less attitude, to safety. Now, less than one year later P&O demand that we work longer hours and more days per year for less. They expect us to just sit back and accept these terms.

I personally think that managements actions in setting out to smash the NUS are a favour from Sterling (P&O Chairman) to Mrs Thatcher. He knows that it is impossible for anyone to work the conditions he is demanding.

Management are demanding that we work a system of 7 days on and 7 days off. During the 7 days on we would be expected to work for at least 16 hours with 8 hours off. During our 8 hours off we would be put off pay. We would have 2 hours for meals and breaks and six for sleeping. Whilst sleeping we would have to put up with the general humdrum of the ship continuing to operate. The longest trip is to Zeebrugge, which takes 3½ hours and the shortest to Calais takes 75 minutes.

In this day and age it should be every workers right to withdraw his or her labour without being victimised like the miners, the print workers, the Silentnight workers the TV-AM technicians and many more. With groups like the Solidarity Network we can start linking these disputes together and learn from each other. I am like millions of other workers, I only want to live in this world - not own it!

Jason Groombridge, P&O strikers, Dover.

SEAFARERS STRIKE IN HULL

From Hull Trades Council

The P&O strike has dominated solidarity work in Hull in recent weeks. The Trades Council has worked closely with the Hull dockers in raising support for the strike.

The P&O strikers first visit to Hull was for two days and £900 was raised. Much of this was raised through workplace visits in the same way money was raised during the miners strike. Some of these visits were in W Yorkshire were £200 was raised at the Prince of Wales and the Kellingly collieries.

One welcome development has been the response from the North Hull Labour Party. A visit to the GC meeting raised £60 with a further £60 from the wards after an appeal was circulated.

Hull's distance from the centre of the strike - and the fact that P&O operate out of the Port of Hull - mean that we need a team of strikers from Dover based regularly in the city. We are making arrangements for that to happen. this will enable the contacts we have made to become firmer and the strikers can build a firm relationship with the NUs rank and file in the area.

OXFORD DISPUTES SUPPORT GROUP REPORT

NUS DISPUTE

A week or so after the first visit to Oxford by the NUS strikers, a few members of the Group printed up their own leaflet on the dispute and held a collection outside Tesco's. They raised £10 in an hour despite the fact that it was not a well known strike at that time. The collection became weekly and since then over £100 has been raised in that way.

On Saturday April 16th a delegation of eight travelled to the picket line in Dover, where we were met by the strikers and taken straight to the docks. There were 30 to 40 seafarers on the picket line with some of them giving out leaflets to vehicles going in. We were told that a picket had been arrested and that the police had said they would release him in 30 minutes if the pickets would keep off the road for that period of time. When he was not released as promised the pickets moved back into the road and stopped all vehicles.

Several vehicles were turned back and our presence on the picket line did help since it boosted the moral of those who were there.

Later we were taken to the Deal strikers food kitchen and then to Magness House for discussions with some of the strikers.

BURTONS DISPUTE

On Friday April 22nd eight pickets turned up in Oxford to picket Burtons in solidarity with Patricia Jennings. 150 leaflets were handed out and there was support from many people going past and reading the placards. The manager of Burtons came out to harass us saying that we were obstructing the highway. Most of the pickets refused to move on others went to picket the Top Shop which is owned by the same firm. Some people turned away at the picket line.

Information and literature from: c/o Citizens Rights Office, 43 Broughton St, Edinburgh.

PICKET AGAINST BENEFIT CUTS

A picket of the DHSS offices was organised in Oxford against the benifit cuts introduced on April 11th.

We started the day at about 7.30 a.m. There was an early morning demonstration outside of the DHSS where we had a joint action with the DHSS trade unions - CPSA and NUCPS. We produced a leaflet which we distributed to the staff and to those signing on at the UBO. About lunch time there was a good crowd outside the DHSS which included the Oxford East MP Andrew Smith. Central News covered it at lunch time.

After lunch we settled down to a claimants picnic - including a bottle of wine, thanks to the staff.

THE KINGS CROSS SIX CAMPAIGN

Following the decision by the Kings Cross branch of ASLEF to take a days strike action in support of the health workers campaign to defend our Health Service, BR management obtained injunctions in the High Court against all six ASLEF Kings Cross branch officials including myself. The proposed strike was quashed by court order on March 10th.

Not content with that victory BR then suspended me from work pending disciplinary action. The following day I was sacked.

My "crime" was to distribute the official branch newsletter to our own members explaining the reasons for the strike. Management admitted at the appeal hearing that I was sacked for trade union activities.

The remaining five branch officers are now under threat of a permenent court injunction. None of them can be seen to be promoting or encouraging action of any kind at Kings Cross. To do so would place then in contempt of court and lay them open to heavy fines or even prison. Three of the five are still on "final warning" from management.

Threats of legal and disciplinary action have extended to all branch members at King Cross. A legally constituted ballot for strike action to achieve my reinstatement was also attacked by management. Drivers were informed by letter that they would be held personally liable for damages to the Boards business. On top of that all drivers at Kings Cross were told that they would be sacked.

BRs jackboot tactics created a climate of fear in which the ballot for strike action was narrowly lost. But the fight cannot stop here. What BR have done at Kings Cross is a direct attack on every trade union branch on the railway What the management have done to me they can do to others. The law can be used to gag other trade unon branches who stand up to management.

The attack on Kings Cross, and my sacking cannot be separtrated from BRs attack on conditions and jobs. they are trying to soften up the **opposition. The new train crew proposals, the open station concept and the abolition of negotiating machinery are all in the pipeline. BR are playing** for high stakes to make the railways more profitable. But if we cannot defend trade union representatives and organisation what chance is there of a fight against these attacks.

* Send emergency resolutions to your union conference demanding Steve Forey's reinstatement and calling for action from the leadership to secure that reinstatement.

* Demand that the union executive obtain the withdrawl of the final warnings from the Kings Cross branch officers.

* Send donations to the campaign.

* Invite a speaker from the campaign to your branch.

Finally, and most important, see what you can do to assist the campaign by agreeing to sponsor it and sending a rep. from your branch to campaign meetings.

The campaign meets every Tuesday, upstairs at the Railway Tavern, York Way, Nr Kings Cross station. at 7.30pm. Donations and correspondance may be sent to c/o Camden Trade Union Support Unit 213 Evershot Street, London NW1.

THE SENIOR COLMAN STRIKE

We have received the following letter from the Senior Colmen Strike Committee informing us that the strike has now been wound up.

Dear Colleagues,

We are writing to inform you that the above dispute has now been resolved. It is with great reluctance that the remaining strikers have accepted a financial stetlement. Our strike action was vindicated by the re-engagement of the remaining original sacked employee, Brother Stanhope. The speed in which the Company began recruitment of a scab workforce and all its implications clearly indicated their intentions.

We have campaigned for over 13 months for justice to be realised and the strikers to be reinstated. In that time we made many sacrifices and many other have been alleviated by the support which we have received from individuals and organisations like yourselves. We sincerely hope that our efforts have not been in vain and that valuable lessons will have to be learned that will in the future be of assistance in the fight against Government and Companies alike who promote and execute anti-trade union attacks. We have lost faith in our fight for re-instatement because of the legislation; but believe we can hold our heads up with dignity having "done our bit" towards the fight to remove the imbalance of power presently enjoyed by the likes of Senior Coleman and other such ruthless and uncaring employers.

We would like to convey the sincere thanks of everyone involved in the dispute for your magnificent support. Without such solidarity we could not have sustained our campaign.

In conclusion, we wish you all the best for the future and every success in all that you hope to acheive.

Yours Fraternally,
G Whyatt, Senior Colman Strike Committee.

KEETONS STRIKE

We are still on strike after rejecting the last management offer in January of this year. This offered 9 places for strikers as new starters and a share in £30,000 for the rest. But the strikers are determind to get full reinstatement.

Picketing is 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and most prospective customers are detered by this. Three scab hauliers, who regard Keetons work as vital to them, are doing as much as they can to help Doyle, Keetons boss. These scab firms are: A&E Transport, S&H Motors and Feswick Steels. They should all be treated as strike breakers. Other companies trading with Keetons are APV Paramount, Fairley Steels, H Whithams and BSC Bromford Tubes.

After 22 months on strike the strikers and their families are suffering great financial hardship. Donations of all kinds are greatly appreciated and destparately needed. Send donations to Keetons Strike Committee, AEU House, Sheffield S1 34E.

THE SARMCOL WORKERS STRUGGLE

The play "The Long March" was brought to Britain in 1986 by the Sarmcol workers cooperative. It was the dramatised true story of the mass dosmissal of nearly 1,000 lawfully striking workers by BTR Sarmcol in Howick, Natal, South Africa.

The workers were sacked after many years of employment at poverty wages by the giant multinational company BTR when they struck for the recognition of their union, MAWU (now NUMSA). This was in May 1985 and their strike is now the longets in the history of S.A. After almost three years the strikers are still meeting regularly each week to repeat their demand on BTR to "negotiate with the union or get out of S.A.

Their story is one of solidarity and survival. Solidarity has come from other workers and whole communities in their area. Some have staged stayaways which have paralised the region. Workers from BTR Dunlop have struck in sympathy.

Survival has meant self-help. They have set up cooperatives to buy bulk food, they grow vegetables and provide health care. One of the strikers cooperatives makes T-shirts for the S.A. labour movement.

BTR is a British Company. It is renowned for its anti-trade unionism and its use of apartheid to exploit black workers in S.A. BTR has refused to speak to the strikers or their union and the union has had to take BTR to court in a long legal battle. The S,A. police have tried to terrorise the strikers and vigilante groups have abducted murdered and tortured strike leaders.

Support should be sent to: NUMSA Campaign Against BTR, 12 Manor Road Extension, Leicester LE2 4FF. Cheques made payable to Sarmcol Solidarity Fund. Badges and stickers can be obtained from Open Eye, 90 Whitechapel, Liverpool L1.

HULME 5 TENANTS ASSOCIATION

The proposals contained in the Housing Bill, due to be on the statute book by the summer or autumn. constitutes the greatest single attack on working class council housing since the war. Without a determined fight-back it will go through and will lead us back to Rachmanism for the poorest sections of the working class.

The Bill gives the Secretary of State powers to set up Housing Action Trusts (HATs) and through them privatise council housing in any area he see fit.

Initially the Tories are planning to set up between five to seven HATs in the first year, rising to perhaps twelve to fifteen over the next two to three years. Once a HAT has been imposed all council rented properties within the HAT boundery will become the responsibility of the HAT. The new landlord will decide rent levels, the quality of repairs and service.

This means that rents will rise, evictions will follow. Local authorities and tenants will have no right to vote against a HAT. All HAT board members will be appointed by the Secretary of State.

Likely HAT locations so far are Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham, and Newham and Southwark in London. High on the Tories hit list is Hulme in Manchester. As Ridley's housing Minister William Waldgrave put it last December: "Hulme must rank as the kind of area to which the HAT policy is relavent." Despite this kind of threat Labours Shadow Environment Minister, Allen Roberts has urged all Labour controlled councils not to oppose HAT in their areas!

But tenants in Hulme, and especially those in Hulme 5 Tenants Association have no intention of accepting the Kinnockite "new realism". As the largest, most active, anti-Tory tenants association in the area, have already succeeded in committing Hulme Ward Labour Party to a position of outright opposition to HATs and it has called on Manchester City Council to do the same. This fightback has now been taken into the wider labour movement - in particular the local government trade unions.

Alan Scott, Acting Chairperson, Hulme 5 Tenants Association.

WHAT TO DO!

P&O STRIKE: All cheques should be made out to Deal Womens Support Group (do not mention the NUS or the strike) and sent to Magnus House, Mill Hill, Deal Kent.

KINGS CROSS: Emergency resolutions to union conferences demanding Steve Forey's reinstatement and calling for action from the leadership. The campaign meets every Tuesday, upstairs at the Railway Tavern, York Way, Nr Kings Cross station. at 7.30pm. Donations and correspondance may be sent to c/o Camden Trade Union Support Unit 213 Evershot Street, London NW1.

BTR SARMCOL: Support should be sent to: NUMSA Campaign Against BTR, 12 Manor Road Extension, Leicester LE2 4FF. Cheques made payable to Sarmcol Solidarity Fund. Badges and stickers can be obtained from Open Eye, 90 Whitechapel, Liverpool L1.

KEETONS: Donations are greatly appreciated and destparately needed. Send donations to Keetons Strike Committee, AEU House, Sheffield S1 34E.

BURTONS: Information and literature from: c/o Citizens Rights Office, 43 Broughton St, Edinburgh.

MEETINGS OF THE SOLIDARITY NETWORK

250 people attended a rally in Finsbury Town Hall on March 15th in solidarity with the various strikes in progress at that time. It was organised jointly by the Solidarity Network and the Chesterfield Socialist Conference.

There were speaches from the seafarers, North London Advertiser, the TV-AM strike, as well as Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn, Mandy Mudd and Jane Shallace. Janet Seymour spoke for the Solidarity Network and John took a collection which raised over £300. This was distributed between the strike delegations present.

STEERING COMMITTEE

The Solidarity Network Steering Committee held its open meeting on May 7th in Deal Miners Welfare Club. It was held there after the picket at Dover and in order to focus on the P&O strike. The attendace of 40 included rank and file leaders of the seafarers, Kent miners and delegations from Leicester, London, Derby, Coventry and Oxford. Out of a good discussion it was decided to work strongly for the rally and demonstration in Dover on May 21st and to work to set up new support groups to back the dispute. Part of this would be a oordination committee for support groups in London.

We decided to meet again on May 21st in Dover after the demonstration. The next open meeting will be on June 4th at 12.00 p.m. at the Unemployed Workers Centre in Leicester.